

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-07
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FM AMCONSUL BELFAST
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1801
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY LONDON

UNCLAS BELFAST 317

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINS, UK
SUBJECT: TERRORISTS HAVE NOT (YET?) EXPLOITED FIREMANS STRIKE

REF: BELFAST 308

1. IT WAS WIDELY FEARED IN NORTHERN IRELAND THAT THE PROVISIONAL IRA WOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE UK-WIDE STRIKE OF FIREMEN WHICH BEGAN NOVEMBER 14, TO INTENSIFY ITS CAMPAIGN OF INCENDIARIES AND FIRE BOMBS. IT HAS NOT HAPPENED, BUT THE AUTHORITIES STILL HAVE THEIR FINGERS CROSSED. SINCE THE STRIKE BEGAN THERE HAVE BEEN ONLY A FEW FIRES CAUSED BY THE PIRA, WHICH THE ARMY'S ACTING FIREMEN HANDLED. OTHERWISE, IN NI TWO SMALL CHILDREN DIED AT THEIR HOME IN AN ACCIDENTAL FIRE, AND A YOUNG GIRL DIED IN A FARMHOUSE FIRE WHICH THE POLICE BELIEVE WAS SET MALICIOUSLY, BUT NOT NECESSARILY BY THE PIRA.

2. CONCERN OVER A PIRA CAMPAIGN INCREASED FRIDAY NOVEMBER 11, WHEN PIRA RAN A SERIES OF EVENTS OBVIOUSLY INTENDED TO TIE UP DOWNTOWN BELFAST. DURING THE AFTERNOON, SECURITY PEOPLE HAD TO CONTEND WITH SOME 18 BOMB WARNINGS. TWO WERE REAL. ONE OF THESE WAS PARTICULARLY WORRISOME, SINCE PIRA HAD NOT USED THE UNCLASSIFIED

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TECHNIQUE FOR SOME MONTHS: A CHARGE OF HE ESTIMATED AT ABOUT THREE POUNDS WAS PLACED IN A HIJACKED VAN. THE VEHICLE WAS LEFT IN A HEAVILY TRAVELLED STREET JUST OUTSIDE THE SECURITY BARRIER, A SHORT BLOCK FROM THE CONGEN. THE BOMB WENT OFF WHEN A SUSPICIOUS SECURITY GUARD OPENED THE VAN DOOR. HE WAS KILLED, AND A COUPLE OF OTHER PEOPLE HURT. WE FELT THE BLAST, WHICH APPEARED AT THE TIME TO COME FROM A BIGGER BOMB. THREE OTHER

HIJACKED VEHICLES WERE ABANDONED SO THAT DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC WAS TIED UP FOR HOURS WHILE BOMB EXPERTS CHECKED THEM OUT. NOTHING WAS FOUND.

3. COMMENT: PIRA MOTIVATION IS OFTEN DIFFICULT TO DETERMINE, BUT THE PRESENT LET UP IN ITS ACTIVITIES (THERE HAVE NOT EVEN BEEN SHOOTINGS) MAY STEM FROM: (1) INABILITY TO DO WHAT IT MIGHT LIKE TO DO -- I.E., A SHORTAGE OF EXPLOSIVES AND EXPERTISE -- AND/OR (2) THE JUDGMENT THAT EXPLOITATION OF THE STRIKE WOULD BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE IN TERMS OF PUBLIC OPINION. IN FAVOR OF THE LATTER THESIS, THE WEST BELFAST PROVISIONAL SINN FEIN ANNOUNCED THE FORMATION OF ITS OWN "PEOPLE'S EMERGENCY FIRE SERVICE" IN THAT CATHOLIC AREA. STOUT

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